CPLT 389W 002/ ENG 389W/ HIST 385W:
Re-presenting the Past: Literature, History, Memory

Spring 2017
Tuesday, 4 – 7 pm
[Room TBA]

Course description:

One of the functions of literature is arguably to tell us about the past: how we became who we are as persons and as a people; what we suffered, how we triumphed, and what shaped our fate. In so doing, it teaches us self-understanding. But it doesn’t tell us only about “our” past. It also tells us about others: the events and forces that shaped “their” lives and sense of identity. In so doing, it teaches us empathy. How does literature render the past in ways that distinguishes it from history? Is it the materials? The approach? Its concept of truth? These are some of the questions that we will consider as we put history and memory side by side, taking American slavery, the Nazi Holocaust, and South African apartheid as our historical touchstones. Conceptually and methodologically, we will be guided by both foundational and recent work in the growing interdisciplinary field of Memory Studies. Drawing on work in this field from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, we will consider how and why people remember and/or forget aspects of the past and what the effects of remembering and/or forgetting can be.

Course materials:

To explore the myriad possibilities through which memory can summon history and history can be invoked by memory, we will read materials from a wide variety of genres: fiction, poetry, drama, essay, literary journalism, documentary literature. Required texts will include Toni Morrison, Beloved; Patrick Modiano, Dora Bruder; Antjie Krog, Country of My Skull; Peter Weiss, The Investigation; Alice Oswald, Memorial.

These literary readings will be supplemented by scholarly material from the field of Memory Studies on issues such as how memory works, the costs of remembering vs. forgetting, forgiveness vs. vengeance, the transgenerational transmission of memory and post-memory.

Films, both documentary and narrative, will complement the readings.
Course requirements:

1. **Weekly responses to the readings** will serve as the basis of class discussion. You will provide two different kinds of responses to the materials assigned in a given week.

   - One response will be analytical and take the form of a *position paper*. You will take some aspect of materials presented and engage them critically (e.g. agreeing disagreeing, proposing an alternative way of thinking, exploring the consequences), making a case for the position you are taking. **Length: c. 500 words.**
   - The other response will be expressly subjective and take a creative form. Here, too, you will respond to some aspect of the materials presented and engage with them, but affectively rather than analytically. The form – medium and mode – you choose is up to you. It can be narrative, poetic, visual (photographs, drawings, collage), performative, or any other form of creative expression that you might come up with.

2. **A memorial project.** In collaboration with another student (or other students) in the class, you will select a “small history” (as opposed to the big histories – Holocaust, Apartheid, American slavery – that the literary texts we are reading in class take up) and identify an unresolved issue that this “small history” presents. You will engage this issue from the perspectives of both history and memory, selecting materials and methods conducive to an exploration of (or confrontation with) this problem. The outcome could be a paper that you submit to a newspaper, a public debate that you organize, a memorial project that you design and implement, a performance.

   Your project will require you to make a case for:

   - The significance of the issue you have identified: How and why is it important? To whom? What might addressing it in the way that you are proposing do?
   - The effectiveness of the form you have chosen to address it with: Whom do you want to reach? How will this form enable you to do so?

**NOTE:** The purpose of this course is to grapple as openly and fully as we can with a complicated set of issues that have ongoing relevance to our lives and our polity. Toward that end, it is important that we engage with one another as fully, openly, and honestly as we can. To facilitate this kind of interaction, I ask that you do not use any electronic devices in class. Bring hard copies (books and printouts of shorter readings) of all assigned readings to class with you. Our work in class will depend on everyone having the requisite materials with them.
Syllabus

Jan. 11  Introduction
Goals, scope, and structure of course. Issues and interests of seminar participants.


** AB presentation: “The Wounds of History and the Work of Memory (Stanford lecture, 2014)

Jan. 18  Class debate: To remember or to forget?
→ Collect evidence to support either affirmative or negative position

Class reading:
# Ursula K. LeGuin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (online)
# Jorge Luis Borges, “Funes, the Memorious” (English translation online: www4.ncsu.edu/~jjsakon/FunesteMemorious.pdf)

** Film: Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras, *Hiroshima, mon amour*
→ Screening: Monday, Jan. 16, 4:30-6pm

Jan. 25  Peter Weiss, *The Investigation*
Neurobiology of memory:
# Daniel Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, chapters 1&2

Feb. 1  Patrick Modiano, *Dora Bruder*
History and memory:
# Pierre Nora, “Between History and Memory: Les lieux de mémoire,” in *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (e-reserve)

Feb. 8  Patrick Modiano, *Dora Bruder* (cont’d)
* Memorial practice 1: AB slide lecture, Renata Stih and Frieder memorial installation, Bavarian Quarter, Berlin

* Memorial practice 2: Irene Klepfisz, “Bashert” (performative reading)

Feb. 15
Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

** Film: Kore-edo Hirokazu, *After Life*
→ Screening: Monday, Feb. 13, 4:30-6pm

Feb. 22
Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (cont’d)

On mourning:
# Sigmund Freud, “Remembering, Repeating and Working Through” (1914)
# _____, “Mourning and Melancholia” (1915)

* Memorial practice: Kara Walker

** Film: Patricio Guzman, *Nostalgia for the Light*
→ Screening: Monday, Feb. 20, 4:30-6pm

Mar. 1
Albie Sachs, “A Man Called Henri,” in *The Strange Alchemy of Life and Law*
→ Presentation of project proposals

March 8
SPRING BREAK

March 15
Presentation of project concepts, design, purpose

March 22
Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull*


** Film: Ari Folman, *Waltz with Bashir*
→ Screening: Monday, March 20, 4:30-6pm
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>March 29</td>
<td>Antjie Krog, <em>Country of My Skull</em> (cont’d)</td>
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<td># Nicole Loraux, “Of Amnesty and Its Opposite” (Course Reserves)</td>
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<td>** Film: Joshua Oppenheimer, <em>The Act of Killing</em></td>
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<td>→ Screening: Monday, March 27, 4:30-6pm</td>
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<td>April 5</td>
<td>Project presentations</td>
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<td>April 12</td>
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<td>April 19</td>
<td>Discussion: Where do we go from here?</td>
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<td>Course evaluations</td>
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<td>May 3</td>
<td>Final projects and critical commentary/reflection due</td>
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